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THE DESERT HARE *LEPUS NIGRICOLLIS* A MINOR PEST OF AGRICULTURE IN PAKISTAN

Neither Roberts in his *Mammals of Pakistan* (1977) nor the *Handbook of Vertebrate Pest Control in Pakistan* (Roberts, ed., 1981) mentions the desert hare (*Lepus nigracollis*) as a significant agricultural pest in Pakistan. We have found that the desert hare attacks and damages groundnut (*Arachis hypogea*) in areas where the crops are planted in sandy soils such as around Talagang and Chakwal (Brooks *et al.* unpublished report, 1986). The hares dig out the groundnuts from shallow holes, crack the hulls and eat the nuts much like rats would. In surveys of 164 fields in the three districts of Attock, Rawalpindi and Chakwal, we found desert hares present in 31 fields and the aggregate damage amounted to 0.7% of all plants counted ($n = 8940$).

In early November 1986 at the National Agricultural Research Centre at Islamabad we observed that desert hares damaged newly sprouted chickpea plants (*Cicer arietinum*) by cutting and eating the growing tips and sometimes browsing on the lesser stems. Assessments of damage in 11 experimental plots revealed that 21.7% of the plants had been attacked. Attempts at chemical control with rodenticidal baits were unsuccessful. Fencing of the entire perimeter of the experimental plot with 1 meter high chicken mesh stopped the damage overnight.

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